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ABSTRACT

When judiciously interpreted, the findings of the Report to the Surgeon General on Television and Social Behavior cannot support any conclusion other than that televised violence is a cause of aggressiveness in children and young people. Given this interpretation, policy guidance research into the effects of television on society should include validation studies; field studies and panel surveys; and high priority issues such as social and psychological processes which influence how televised violence affects aggressiveness, mitigating condition, prosocial effects of televised violence, and prosocial influences of television. Policy studies should include production -- the social and economic mechanisms for freeing production from competition that makes violence so attractive; programming--the social and economic dynamics for reducing the utility of violence as a means of gaining audiences attractive to advertisers; and consumer action--social mechanisms by which various concerned public groups can learn what they should do, and broadcasters can become more conscious of public needs and dissatisfactions. (Author/SH)

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George A. Comstock

May 1972

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TELEVISION VIOLENCE: WHERE THE SURGEON GENERAL'S STUDY LEADS

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What the news media have variously called the \$1 million and \$2 million government study of the effects of televised violence on young people is now largely history. The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior has issued its report -- Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence;¹ reports of the research funded under the program have been published -- in the five volumes totalling 2,330 pages;² and Senator John O. Pastore, who called for the study, held

¹ Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence. Report to the Surgeon General, United States Public Health Service, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1972.

² G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (eds.) Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 1: Media Content and Control. J. P. Murray, E. A. Rubinstein, and G. A. Comstock (eds.). Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 2: Television and Social Learning. G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (eds.). Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 3: Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness. E. A. Rubinstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (eds.). Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 4: Television in Day-to-Day Life: Patterns of Use. G. A. Comstock, E. A. Rubinstein, and J. P. Murray (eds.). Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 5: Television's Effects: Further Explorations. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1972.

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four days of hearings on the implications of the findings -- March 21-24, 1972, before the Commerce Committee's Communications Subcommittee, of which he is chairman.³ Yet, the subject cannot be said to be closed.

A number of dramas and controversies are certain to continue to inspire discussion. These include the role of the networks and the National Association of Broadcasters in the selection of the membership for the advisory committee;⁴ the role in the writing of the committee report of those among the 12 members who have been called the "network five";⁵ the dissatisfaction with the committee report, and what Jack Anderson called a "researcher backlash," on the part of some social scientists who conducted research under the program; and, the extraordinary lack of unanimity and turnabouts in the interpretation of the report and the associated research by the news media.⁶

The advisory committee's report is underiably embellished with qualifications. To many, it is in regard to clarity the Last Year at Marienbad of social science. Joseph Morgenstern in Newsweek commented,

³The request for the study was formally made by Senator Pastore in a letter to then Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Finch, March 5, 1969. The then Surgeon General, William H. Stewart, told the Communications Subcommittee on March 12 that he would appoint "an advisory panel of experts." The formal directive authorizing the advisory committee was issued by Secretary Finch on April 16, 1969.

⁴For discussion of the appointment procedure, see Science, May 22, 1970.

⁵The advisory committee members, those with network affiliations listed first, were: Thomas E. Coffin, Vice President, NBC; Joseph T. Klapper, Research Director, CBS; Ira H. Cisin, Professor of Sociology, George Washington University, and CBS consultant; Harold Mendelsohn, Professor of Communications, University of Denver, and CBS consultant; Gerhardt D. Wiebe, Dean, School of Communications, Boston University, and former CBS executive; Eveline Omwake, Professor of Child Development, Connecticut College; Charles A. Pinderhughes, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Tufts University; Anthony F. C. Wallace, Professor of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania; Andrew S. Watson, Professor of Psychiatry and Law, University of Wisconsin; Irving L. Janis, Professor of Psychology, Yale University; Alberta E. Siegel, Associate Professor of Psychology, Stanford University; and Ithiel de Sola Pool, Professor of Political Science, M.I.T.

⁶The New York Times broke the story January 11, 1972, under the head, "TV Violence Held Unharmful to Youth," and this interpretation, probably on the basis of the Times' authority, was widely disseminated in the media. Coverage soon reversed, and the report began to be interpreted correctly as finding a causal link between violence viewing and aggressiveness. An exception was Broadcasting Magazine, the industry publication, which held to the initial interpretation.

"Whether by intent or ineptitude, the committee misrepresented some of the data, ignored some of it and buried all of it alive in prose that was obviously meant to be unreadable and unread."⁷ Constance Holden in Science excused the New York Times for its erroneous front page headline when it broke the story, "TV Violence Held Unharmful to Youth," on the grounds that "such a generalization is not incomprehensible in view of the stream of ambiguities and qualified statements contained in the report."⁸ Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue that the report reaches any conclusion other than that televised violence is a cause of aggressiveness among children and young people, or that a judicious interpretation of the evidence would support any other conclusion.

Given this circumstance -- a broad but pertinent and scientifically and socially meaningful conclusion that can command consensus -- there is, from the perspectives of social science and social policy, only modest if any utility in resuscitating the past unless such an effort can guide future activity. There are two very different areas to which the experience of the television violence study can contribute:

- 1) the general question of the design and organization of programs to resolve social issues and/or solve social problems through science, and in particular social science;
- 2) the topic-specific question of the future for research and policy in regard to the effects of television on society.

This paper concentrates on the latter, and in particular on the implications of the television violence study for research and policy concerned with the effects of televised violence on the young. The consequence of this emphasis is that program structure also receives some attention.

Three Themes

Three themes underlie the comments and suggestions that follow:

- 1) The central question of the role of televised violence in aggressiveness among the young cannot be taken as fully resolved. The most justifiable interpretation of the evidence presently

⁷ Newsweek, February 14, 1972.

⁸ Science, February 11, 1972.

available is that televised violence increases aggressiveness. The case, however, is not beyond reversal.

- 2) The processes and dynamics, social and psychological, involved in any effects of televised violence on aggressiveness clearly demand further thorough and extensive investigation. Particularly important are: a) the circumstances which increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior attributable to the viewing of televised violence, and b) the circumstances which mitigate any such effects. At present, understanding of the phenomenon now given the stamp of scientific verisimilitude is remarkably slight.
- 3) Systematic attention to public policy and action -- what should be done -- is now not only justifiable but a logical consequence of the present state of knowledge, and is a suitable topic for study. Such study transcends research which would enhance knowledge about television's effects. Instead, it steps into two new and crucial areas: a) how that knowledge can be disseminated and put to use, and b) the development of policies and social mechanisms that would lead to television with more desirable qualities.

Before the Surgeon General's study, the testing of what may be called the "causal hypothesis" in regard to televised violence's effect had research priority. Now, the implications of confirmation have priority.

There is only an apparent paradox in proposing the second and third emphases in conjunction with an expression of skepticism about the finding which justifies them. The situation is a common one where a state of doubt requires that study -- scientific or otherwise -- must precede decision. It frequently occurs, as in this case, that the evidence suggests that there would be greater risk in rejecting than in accepting a proposition while certainty remains insufficient to exclude the proposition from further scrutiny. It is this kind of judgment that Percy Tannenbaum apparently was making when he told Newsweek: "We cannot wait for all the evidence to come in. In this case it can never be all in. The real question is when do we as a society take action. If there is a clear and present danger that televised violence is harmful to our children, then we should simply say, 'This is enough.'"⁹

⁹Newsweek, March 6, 1972.

Not Fully Resolved

The proposition that the culpability of television is not a completely settled question should find little opposition in the scientific community. The contention is not based on the axiom that nothing is ever permanently resolved in science, but on doubts about the evidence.

The totality of findings, to which the Surgeon General's study contributed importantly, merits being construed as a strong case. Numerous laboratory experiments over the past decade have demonstrated that young children will imitate behavior defined as aggressive by the investigators that has been observed on television or film, and that both young children and older youth, after viewing film or television sequences categorized as violent, will engage in behavior differing from what has been seen that has been defined by the investigators as aggressive. The results of new experiments in the Surgeon General's study are consistent with these findings. More important because of the paucity of causal evidence from outside the laboratory, a number of studies undertaken for the Surgeon General that involved measures of everyday behavior -- a field experiment in a nursery school, a panel study encompassing 10 years in the lives of young people, and a variety of surveys -- produce findings supporting the causal hypothesis.

Acceptance of the causal hypothesis rests on the consistency of the findings of these varied studies. The components taken separately are less convincing.

Nowhere are the objections made to the laboratory experiments directly met -- that the circumstances of measurement are abnormal because of the absence of social inhibitions against aggressiveness and the possibility of retaliation; that imitation depends largely on the presence in the measurement situation of stimuli similar or identical to that observed earlier; and, that aggressiveness is operationalized in a form far from equivalent to what might occur in everyday, "true" aggressiveness. The thrust of these arguments is that what is attributable to television in a laboratory setting has little to do with what transpires in ordinary behavior and that, consequently, they provide little, if any, support for the causal hypothesis.

The support from the studies involving measures of everyday behavior, taken alone, also is not overwhelming. Where the viewing of television violence and aggressiveness are clearly shown to be positively associated, the numbers of young people involved are relatively small and the geographical

locales are confined to three. Where the data can be interpreted as showing that violence viewing precedes later aggressiveness, the measures are open to question. In regard to the 10-year panel study that employs a statistical model that permits causal inference, and which concludes that violence viewing at eight years of age is a "probable cause" of aggressiveness (some 10 years later), there are many questions that can be raised about the appropriateness of the measures -- both over the meaningfulness of those for aggressiveness and over the suitability of both viewing and aggressiveness measures for the kind of analysis employed.

In regard to the causal hypothesis, the laboratory experiments at present depend in part for their relevance on the supportive findings from the studies measuring everyday behavior. In turn, these latter studies alone are not totally convincing. Future research, then, must: a) undertake to deal with the objections to the laboratory experiments, thereby establishing the link between the laboratory and ordinary life, and b) undertake to further verify in studies using measures of everyday behavior the apparent causal role of televised violence in aggressiveness. Such research is essential to insure that policy and action based on confirmation of the causal hypothesis is justified.

Processes and Dynamics

One need not look far in the research supported under the television violence study to find guidance for the assigning of priorities for future research. The potpourri of methods and topics includes: panel studies; field experiments and studies; and studies of social and psychological processes, mitigating conditions, and pro-social effects. This mix is not inadvertent; if it were otherwise, the dividends of the violence study would be lost.

First, the two methods:

- 1) Panel studies. The 10-year panel study by Lefkowitz, et al. (1972) stands as a landmark; it represents a "first" as a longitudinal TV effects study and the overcoming of the innumerable obstacles that inhibit long-term investigations. Whether one accepts the mode of analysis chosen by the authors or the approaches of other interpreters (Chaffee, 1972; Kenny, 1972; Neale, 1972), the data make an important contribution to the support for the causal hypothesis.

Nevertheless, the study involves a far from representative sample and one that, conceivably, could be atypical in regard to the issues investigated. Moreover, many questions, as indicated earlier, can be raised about the methods used. Future panel studies with different populations and with several different characteristics are called for: a) better measures of aggressiveness (for comparability over time, the same index of aggressiveness was used at both ends of the decade and it is hard to argue that aggressiveness does not change in character and meaning with maturation); b) better measures of violence viewing (the early measure relied on parental report, the latter, on self-report, and both sought "favorite programs" rather than actual exposure to televised violence); c) the addition of measures of pro-social behavior; and d) a much shorter time span -- perhaps 2-3 years (which would solve some of the problems relating to the measurement of aggressiveness and violence viewing). Panel studies merit high priority because of their explanatory power in regard to causation in addition to using, like all surveys, measures of everyday behavior.

- 2) Field experiments and studies. Stein and Friedrich (1972) avoided the skepticism adhering to laboratory experiments by controlling exposure to violent, neutral, and pro-social television in a nursery school and measuring effects by the observation of actual behavior. Outside the Surgeon General's study, Feshbach and Singer (1971), Wells (in preparation), and Milgram (in preparation) have also conducted field experiments on the effects of televised violence. Such studies should have high priority because of their several scientific merits and a singular "political" merit. Scientifically, they have great explanatory power because they combine the control of the laboratory experiment, which permits causal inference, with everyday settings and measures of everyday behavior; put simply, they can possess rigor without sacrifice of the complexity of the ordinary. Their political merit is that, because of these scientific attributes, they are generally perceived as extraordinarily convincing by laymen.

Next, the research topics:

- 3) Social and psychological processes. The conditions and psychological

mechanisms that mediate between the viewing of televised violence and any behavioral effect are only slightly understood. Nevertheless, there are a number of promising leads. Dominick and Greenberg (1972) found self-reports of family disapproval of aggressiveness to be negatively related to attitudes favoring aggressive behavior among pre-adolescent boys and girls. McLeod, et al. (1972a, 1972b), Chaffee and McLeod (1971) and Chaffee (1972) interpret their data on adolescent boys and girls as suggesting that learning of ways to behave and identification with violent characters may be mediators, and report that in families where nonaggression is emphasized the generally present positive correlation between violence viewing and aggressiveness tends to disappear. Ekman, et al. (1972) interpret the finding that positive emotional reactions by very young boys while viewing violence predicts later aggressiveness as indicating that identification with an aggressor is a mediator. Tannenbaum (1972) has been investigating various dimensions of physiological and emotional arousal as a mediator, and while his work with college age subjects has raised the possibility that any arousing material may stimulate later aggressiveness, it also suggests that arousal of some sort may be a useful concept to explain some or all of any contribution televised violence may make to aggressiveness. The many laboratory experiments of the past decade suggest that imitation, which depends on the learning of specific behaviors, and the disinhibition of internal constraints against aggressiveness may be important contributory factors ("instigation" is often used as if synonymous with disinhibition, but as a concept it would appear to be of little explanatory value unless given specific definition since it amounts to no more than the naming of the observed effect rather than the stipulation of the means by which the effect occurs). At present, social candidates that merit attention would seem to include: a) family values in regard to aggressiveness; b) family values in regard to behavior that may facilitate or deter aggressiveness; c) peer norms; d) the influence of other media besides television; and, e) the influence of the general social context -- social class, and milieu in which the young person is growing up. Psychological candidates include: a) learning of

specific behaviors, which would be reflected in imitation (that the degree of learning by observation necessary for imitation to occur takes place with television is established; the open question concerns the relative role of this kind of learning and imitation in real life aggressiveness); b) disinhibition, or the lessening of internal constraints; c) learning of values favoring aggressiveness, or the enhancement of tendencies to use aggressive means ("instigation" possibly should be reserved for this particular mechanism); d) learning of general ways to behave that are aggressive or facilitate aggressive acts; e) identification with aggressive characters; and, f) physiological and emotional arousal. Research on social and psychological processes have high priority because it is only through their being understood that ways can be found to ameliorate the effect of televised violence.

- 4) Mitigating conditions. This in part represents a sub-class of research concerned with mediating processes. However, it also encompasses the investigation of content factors that may have some influence on the effect of the portrayal of violence. Even were it wholly redundant, it would merit separate attention for its unambiguous relevance to policy and because, given the rather narrow focus, it offers an alternative emphasis within any coherent program of future research. The findings of Dominick and Greenberg (1972) and McLeod, et al. (1972a, 1972b) on the influence of family emphasis on nonaggressiveness, already mentioned, suggest one area for future study. Leifer and Roberts (1972) found little if any evidence supporting the frequently voiced contention that the motivations and consequences portrayed in connection with violence influence the tendency for violence viewing to increase aggressiveness. Feshbach (1972) found that the labelling of violence as fantasy produced in a Hollywood studio led to significantly less later aggressiveness than when the same dramatic material was identified as a newsreel recording real life. The effects of these and other content elements deserve further study. Whatever the topic, research focused on mitigating conditions should not confine itself to the confirmation of theoretically important hypotheses. It

should also attempt to deal with a) the quantitative issue of the frequency with which successful strategies are practiced, and b) the means by which such strategies can be applied. The criteria for such research should supplement the conventional scientific demand for increasing knowledge with the policy demand for practical guidance. Research on mitigating conditions as high priority for the translation of the present acceptance of the causal hypothesis into meaningful and constructive social behavior.

- 5) Pro-social effects. Stein and Friedrich (1972) found evidence of pro-social effects as a consequence of violence viewing among children from families of higher socio-economic status, and evidence of pro-social effects as a consequence of viewing non-violent, socially constructive television. Research into pro-social effects of violence viewing, and pro-social effects of other television content both have high priority; the former informs us of possible costs in reducing exposure to violent content, and the latter of benefits that may be derived from alternative content.

All of these suggested approaches focus on effects. It is also important, however, that there be a continuing measurement of the quantity and character of violence shown on television, such as Gerbner (1972) has conducted over the past three years, and occasional investigations of the extent of television viewing, particularly of violent programs, among the young (for example, Lyle and Hoffman, 1972). Both are necessary as indices of the extent of the problem and, as policies are directed toward the changing of content and viewing patterns, the extent of policy success.

Policy Studies and Programs

The conspicuously absent element in the Surgeon General's study are suggestions, recommendations, or implications for policy. This absence is no surprise. The advisory committee was constrained from policy rumination by Robert Finch, then Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. As the committee report states, "The Secretary said the committee would confine itself solely to scientific findings and make no policy recommendations."

Even without this admonition, however, it is unlikely that the advisory committee would have ventured into policy discussion or recommendation.

The predominant background of the membership was social science leavened heavily by academia. Intellectually, it lacked the expertise, temperamentally, the inclination. In addition, the network representation, while conceivably permissible for functioning within the ethical and intellectual boundaries of scientific interpretation, created a group for which policy was a treacherous area. The chariness in this regard is perhaps illustrated by the reaction of a committee member who is a network consultant to the suggestion that the committee should identify any influence of television on aggressiveness, however small, as having special importance because television represents almost the totality of influences readily open to change: Verboten; it was of policy relevance.

Nevertheless, it was ironic to find that so little could be said when Senator Pastore during his four days of hearings asked what could be done. The networks promised, as they have for a decade, to reduce violence. The Surgeon General recommended a continuing measurement of the amount of violence on television.

The policy box remained largely empty. Yet, there is no reason why this should be so.

Chaffee and McLeod (1972) have suggested three points of possible influence: a) television content; b) television viewing; and, c) the way what is viewed is interpreted and acted upon. They reject content control because of First Amendment prohibitions and an understandable disinclination to interfere with the freedom of the mass media. They doubt the feasibility and the likely effectiveness of control of viewing, a responsibility that would fall to the home; it is thought to be hard to enforce, to occur infrequently, and to be open to boomerang by stimulating aggressiveness as the result of frustration over being deprived of popular shows. This leaves voluntary control by broadcasters and intervention in the processes involved in the way television is interpreted and acted upon.

However, it is not at all clear that content and viewing are so beyond influence. At the same time, it seems unlikely that much can be expected from interventive efforts involving the viewer in the absence of facilitating social machinery; it just doesn't happen often enough on its own. Content, viewing, intervention -- even assuming that we know what we want to do about each -- all call for policy study. Moreover, in the case of televised violence, the effectiveness of policy in one sphere is apt to bear heavily on success in another.

The bars to influencing content are not wholly legal, since all sorts of material are excluded from television (pornography, profanity, gratuitous insult to religious or ethnic groups, etc.), but are also in the industrial structure of broadcasting. Success means winning the largest possible audience of prospective customers for advertisers, and violence is often seen as a plausible means. To change the means, reduce their payoff or change the goal -- by constraining incentives, by shifting incentives, or by producing television outside the commercial context. The bars to home control of viewing are the normative pattern, from which it is hard to force individual deviation, and practicality, which depends not only on the power to restrict but on knowing what to restrict. If television content can be altered, normative viewing may change, reducing this particular inhibitory pressure; and better information can do much to make viewing control easier.

First generation policy studies and programs should be directed toward three areas: production, programming, and consumer action. In detail:

- 1) Production. In policy terms, Children's Television Workshop (Sesame Street, The Electric Company) may be considered a social experiment or demonstration project in the production of instructional television for young children. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting-Public Broadcasting Service complex may be viewed in the same light in regard to public affairs and cultural broadcasting. The key in both instances is the removal of production from the economic exigencies of competitive commercial broadcasting. A plausible complement would be the production of non-pedagogic entertainment for children and youth in the absence of commercial competitiveness.¹⁰ The issue for policy study: how?
- 2) Programming. The current bind of economic competition that makes violence so intractable as an element of entertainment may be broken either by a) consumer pressure, which renders violence less satisfying as a shelf item for commercial broadcasters, or

¹⁰ The current government anti-trust action to end network interest in television production is not likely to provide much relief in regard to violence, for non-network production will take place under the same competitive constraints as at present. As B. C. Moore, Jr., a member of one of Nader's research groups, told the New York Times (April 15, 1972), "There'll be more of the same general types of programs -- different Westerns, mysteries with more diverse plots, different forms, different appeals. There will be more diversity because the perception of audience desires of a large number of television advertisers, who will be sponsoring the programs directly, is more varied than the perceptions of the networks."

b) by reducing the competition itself. In the first instance, costs are informally increased until violence is abandoned; policy effort of this sort is discussed below. In the second, formal or informal arrangements exclude violence as a means at least within some limited portion of programming. The issue for policy study: how?

- 3) Consumer action. Action by consumers depends on a) knowledge, and b) social mechanisms. So far, both have relied on ad hoc, accidental, and voluntary behavior. Knowledge has been disseminated by the mass media in accord with their usual criteria of novelty and newsworthiness. Mechanisms have been confined to such active but limited groups as the National Association for Better Broadcasting and Action for Children's Television, letters and other informal communications to broadcasters, and the occasional statements of public officials -- where often one must choose between Dean Burch and Nicholas Johnson. What is needed is regular, informed reaction to television, preferably at the community or regional as well as at the national level. The issue for policy study: how?

The growing "press council" movement -- where community boards monitor press activity -- provides a partial model. However, the justification in regard to television is much stronger. Our society holds that news, delivered under an ethic of objectivity, should suffer as little constraint as possible, and that mature citizens can evaluate news individually without help. Neither of these admonitory values exist in regard to television that entertains children and young people.

Such a social invention might be called a community television council or workshop. It might bring together representatives of the various concerned and involved publics -- education, business, parents, social science, law enforcement -- in an organization with a professional staff that would regularly and formally react through public report to television viewed by children and the young. Its functions would be a) to judge and criticize, b) to disseminate information to both public and broadcasters, and c) to recommend action by broadcasters, educators, parents and others in the community. By these three means, it would translate the findings of social science and policy studies on a national level into concrete local action. Its recommendations would bear on three areas: a) school programs -- how educators should deal with television; b) home behavior -- how parents should

deal with television; and, c) television performance -- what broadcasters might do to help. No institutionalized attack on television is envisioned. The recommendations would not be confined to the possibly harmful, but would also, and probably for the most part, advance concrete constructive uses of the medium. Special emphasis would be given to the place of television experience in the regular school curriculum in the hope of some integration of the schoolhouse culture, in which the young are not always willing participants, with the so willingly embraced culture of television. Obviously, such a social invention could readily encompass other media as well as television. Television's enormous popularity, however, makes it the prime concern.

In sum, we need to discover how to produce more desirable television, how to release competition's hold on programming, and how to construct meaningful everyday action from what social science can learn. All three foci require the cooperative efforts of lawyers, economists, broadcasting specialists, and political scientists, as well as those concerned with the role of communication in people's lives -- psychologists, sociologists, and communicologists. There is a need for models and alternatives for action as well as for findings whose scientific stature provide the underlying premises for such endeavors.

Management and Integration

If the question of policy is given primary emphasis in future research and study, a number of issues become resolved. Put another way, the solution of policy questions leads to certain requirements for research and its management. These include a) the criteria for selecting projects, and b) the mode of overall management.

The studies on which the Surgeon General's advisory committee drew were chosen largely on the basis of relevance to television, broadly defined, and scientific merit in comparison with other immediate contenders, also broadly defined. More specifically, the criteria were a) relevance to the topic area of television and its social effects, with priority given to a focus on the contribution of televised violence to aggressiveness, and b) scientific quality when judged against other studies competing for funding at the same time. Research on behalf of policy requires a principal criterion of question-relevance rather than subject area-relevance; candidate projects compete in their ability to provide the answers necessary for the making of policy and scientific merit in the abstract becomes irrelevant.

Although obviously rather different sectors of the research and policy communities will be the source of the various kinds of studies necessary, the requirement of interchange and coordination implies an integrated effort. Ideally, this would mean a single, central program that would select and monitor, as well as perhaps itself conduct, both theory-derived research and action-oriented studies, with implementation residing in the same or a closely connected organization. At the minimum, what is required is central coordination to provide some sense of unity to the community concerned with communications policy research.

In Conclusion

The major thrusts of future research and study must seek the answers that would guide policy, and the mechanisms through which policy -- or, in alternate language, change -- can be implemented. There must be a commitment, reflected in the mode of research and study management, to the conversion of findings to action. This implies a common locus for the coordination of both kinds of undertakings.

The foci of research that would increase knowledge that would guide policy should include:

- 1) Validation studies a) settling the unresolved questions raised about the laboratory studies dealing with the effects of televised violence, and b) confirming the evidence supporting the causal hypothesis now found in survey and field studies. Such research need not dilute attention to other issues; it can be readily encompassed in studies that further explore the factors underlying any causal effect.
- 2) Field studies and panel surveys should receive emphasis because of their explanatory power and, in the case of field experiments, special credence.
- 3) Issues which should have high priority include: a) social and psychological processes which have an influence or mediating role in televised violence's effect on aggressiveness; b) mitigating conditions; c) pro-social effects of televised violence; and, d) the pro-social influences of television.

Policy studies -- what some might call "research and development" -- should focus on:

- 1) Production, and in particular on the social and economic mechanisms

by which production can be freed from the competitive dynamics that make violence so attractive as an ingredient.

- 2) Programming, and in particular on the social and economic dynamics that would reduce the utility of violence as a means of gaining audiences attractive to advertisers.
- 3) Consumer action, and in particular on the social mechanisms by which the various concerned publics can be both informed of what they should do, and broadcasters can be made more conscious of public needs and dissatisfactions.

The evidence at present -- despite the attention given here to the importance of further confirmation -- clearly indicates that televised violence contributes to aggressiveness among the young, and therefore constitutes a significant and serious problem for our society -- and probably for other modernized societies as well. Our society has pioneered in the study of this issue. It now has the opportunity to pioneer in its solution.

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